Textual Archaeology of the Ancient Near East:
Are We Doing It Wrong?

10th -13th December, 2015
McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research

Session I: Assyriology and Archaeology
Friday, December 11th

Of Haematite and Apricots: Matching Up the Mesopotamian World
Nicholas Postgate, University of Cambridge

My talk will take a retrospective look over the past half century at some of the successes and failures of attempts to reunite the evidence of the cuneiform sources with ancient Mesopotamian iconography and with data recovered from archaeological investigation and from ethnography. Examples will be taken from the fields of agriculture and animal husbandry, metrology and architecture, with a couple of case studies from religious iconography. Having described these cases, I will look at how the collaboration of the disciplines was initiated and managed, and from this possibly draw some lessons and offer

Mind the Gap! Building a Methodology to Overcome the Text:Artifact Divide in the Ancient Near East
Christina Tsouparopoulou, Universität Heidelberg

This paper will address the text:artefact divide in ancient Near Eastern studies, and assess the different methodologies used (or not used) in bridging it. Archaeologists working with, and especially excavating inscribed objects have long advocated for their proper documentation in the same way as all other archaeological artefacts, i.e. as contextualized finds (R. Zettler, McG.Gibson, C. Reichel). This is definitely a first step in understanding the nuances of inscribed artefacts as social objects, and in applying a holistic and integrated approach to the material culture of the ancient Near East. Others have looked at the "materials-profiling" of inscribed objects, or "diplomatics," which entails the meticulous study of the minutiae of inscribed objects (D. Charpin and J. N. Postgate). Here, typologies of text genres and tablet formats are also important, as most recently demonstrated by J. Taylor's work towards creating the first proper typology of inscribed objects throughout millennia of Mesopotamian history. Is the time to treat inscribed clay documents as pottery sherds, and

study the fabric of clay?

I will present preliminary statistics from the literature to assess how many scholars are combining text and artefact in a meaningful way, and who is most interested in doing so - Assyriologists or archaeologists? How many Assyriologists are using visual representations of inscribed objects, discussing the physical characteristics of documents and their materials and is this important? How many archaeologists are willing or able to at least try to use textual material in their studies, how many are doing metatext analysis (i.e. identifying objects described in texts in the archaeological record in the manner of D. T. Potts and P. R. S. Moorey) – and is this important? What are the pitfalls of these methods? Regarding context and texts it is more or less clear that archaeologists digging up texts treat them as materials for archaeological documentation while Assyriologists are there to read them. However, what do we do with texts that are not contextualized, were never properly excavated or were excavated at a time when methods of finds documentation did not apply to texts?

After gauging various successful and unsuccessful methodologies, I will promote an approach of "entanglement" as advocated by I. Hodder, which should be treated as a second step in evaluating the material dimensions of inscribed objects. Based on the materiality of texts, this approach would entail components such as context, diplomatics, physical characteristics, minutiae, production technology, and the agency texts). It will be a full assessment of an inscribed object's use, social life, and agency. I will call it 'materialitäts-profiling' of texts, which will hopefully allow us to *bridge* the gap and not just 'mind' it.

Respondent
Richard Zettler, University of Pennsylvania

Session II: Archaeology and Texts in Syria and the Levant
Friday, December 11th

Figural and Aniconic Deities of the Bronze Age Levant, in Texts and Archaeology
Marie-Henriette Gates, Bilkent University, Ankara

The first textual sources referring to formal religious practice in the northern Levant and inner Syria coincided with the emergence of "urbanism" in the region, during the mid-third millennium B.C. (Early Bronze III). The "urban" archaeological contexts to which they relate are now recognized as largely non-residential. They instead provided civic, storage and religious facilities to tribal communities that chose to emulate some structural features of contemporary Sumer, but otherwise retained a traditional, migrant lifestyle. As part of the same cultural process, their deities came indoors to be housed in built temples, where they assumed two (not necessarily exclusive) forms: anthropomorphic, like their Mesopotamian counterparts; and aniconic, by local custom. The gods' places of residence likewise alternated with the seasons between enclosed spaces and open-air settings. The two divine forms, long associated with an urban *vs.* nomadic cultic practice, can better be seen to reconcile the progressive and conservative cultural trends within Syria's EB III society.
These complementary aspects of divinity are well illustrated in the regional archaeological record through the end of the Bronze Age (and beyond), by figural representations of gods and by "standing stones." On the other hand, the written record is considered the primary source to interpret their religious significance, not least because of biblical interest in aniconism and transcendence. The relevant texts express the official and doctrinal circumstances of literate authorities, however, and may be far removed from unofficial practice involving non-regulated but pervasive beliefs. This paper will examine whether the extant texts can define the various manifestations of these deities, from the perspective of Bronze Age cultures and religions that were located on the peripheries of literacy.

Biblical Archaeology in The Postmodern Era: Towards A New Dialogue between Archaeology and the Bible
Shlomo Bunimovitz, Tel Aviv University

For over a century, the archaeology of the southern Levant went hand in hand with the Bible. Biblical archaeology, the outcome of this interaction, has been normally conceived as the handmaiden of the biblical texts, authenticating and illustrating them. Whether motivated by a theological or secular agenda, the main tenet of biblical archaeology was political history. In spite of recent claims for the emancipation of archaeology from the tyranny of the biblical texts, the archaeological agenda is still biblical, pursuing questions related to biblical historiography. Paradoxically, however, due to its problematic nature, the use of the Bible in archaeological discourse is considered today almost illegitimate.
Relying on theoretical improvements promoted by the postmodern post-processual/interpretive archaeology, archaeology of the southern Levant can revitalize its dialogue with the Bible. Conceiving of both biblical texts and ancient material artifacts as cultural documents, their inspection provides fruitful and enlightening insights. Words and artifacts give us access to the mindsets of the people of the biblical period. Encapsulated in both are the worldviews, cosmology, perceptions of landscape, ideology, symbolism, etc. of the people who produced them. A series of recent studies practicing this innovative approach manifest the new vistas opened for a postmodern Biblical archaeology.

Respondent - Susan Sherratt, University of Sheffield

Session III: Out of Mesopotamia and into Iran
Friday, December 11th

"Man", "Plough", "Cow": Progress and Pitfalls in the Decipherment of Proto-Elamite
Jacob Dahl, University of Oxford

Over the past 150 years tremendous advances have been made in the decipherment of Akkadian, Sumerian, and the other languages written with cuneiform. However, as was noted by Damerow (2006), the same progress has not been matched in the decipherment of the very earliest texts from the ancient Near East, and it has become clear that the traditional philological methods of decipherment are progressively less suited for increasingly older texts. However, important improvements in the understanding of the earliest texts from Mesopotamia and Iran, proto-cuneiform and proto-Elamite, have been made through very different methodologies. On the one hand, historians of mathematics have developed a system of decipherment relying on the reconstruction of the context specific numerical systems and notations found in the largely administrative texts from these periods, and on the other hand, philologists working with archaeologists, and using textual and archaeological data, have made advances in decipherment through an understanding of the administrative reality behind the texts. In this brief talk I will first go over two examples of past advances in the decipherment of proto-Elamite using the methods outlined here, whereafter I will propose a range of new topics for future exploration.

Of Tablets and Bricks: Institutional Landscapes in Achaemenid Archives and Provinces
Wouter Henkelman, École Pratiques des Hautes Études

Although students of the Achaemenid Empire have generally tended to integrate textual and archaeological materials, the publication and exploration of the Persepolis Fortification Archive has meant a critical breakthrough in terms of interdisciplinary approaches. The archive implies a wilful organisation of the physical space and the reservoir of manpower available in the Achaemenid heartland (roughly the modern province of Fars, Iran). Elements in that documented landscape are increasingly visible in the material record: roads, bridges, plantations, way stations, storehouses, etc. What is perhaps more intriguing, however, is the intentionality of such planning: in the heartland one might still assume an organic development, but particularly in the eastern and northeastern provinces other explanations have to be sought. Here too, there is evidence for large-scale institutional household economies using Aramaic and Elamite for their administration, having well-developed logistic infrastructures and complex hierarchies mimicking those found at Persepolis. Again, these elements may be linked with the results of ongoing excavations in the pertinent regions, which have revealed planned central fortified sites with specialised functions, roads with way stations at regular intervals, canals, etc. That the Achaemenids were willing (and able) to create such institutional landscapes on the model of their heartland, suggests that they could conceive of these as systems that could be instrumentalized to develop and control lands far from the empire's core. The integrated approach brings us, in other words, much closer to the very essence of the Achaemenid empire.

Respondent - Cameron Petrie, University of Cambridge

Session IV: Text, Image, and Archaeology
Friday, December 11th

The (Uninscribed) Material Culture of Dedication in the Early Dynastic Temple
Jean Evans, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München

The typologies of objects dedicated to the Early Dynastic temple are organized around a relatively small number of inscribed examples, primarily of stone. Inscribed sculpture, vessels, mace heads, plaques, and other items are designated dedicatory objects foremost by the verb of dedication (**a-ru**/*šarākum*) preserved in the inscriptions on an even smaller number of examples within the corpus. But the boundaries for designating an object as dedicatory are more fluid than the existing typology allows and even these typologies are complicated by a consideration of individual inscribed examples. An archaeologically-based methodology has the potential to complement the current typologies with their reliance solely on inscriptions, especially since the evidence preserved in Early Dynastic texts reveals a much broader material culture of dedication. Ultimately, certain depositional patterns in the archaeological record suggest new typologies of Early Dynastic dedicatory objects. Through an examination primarily of the Diyala temples remains, this contribution therefore attempts to widen the sphere of Early Dynastic dedication through a consideration of uninscribed categories of material culture.

Magical Gems as Material Texts
Caitlín E. Barrett, Cornell University

In the study of the ancient Mediterranean, attempts to synthesize multiple forms of evidence have often taken implicitly logocentric forms: e.g., treating material culture as an illustration of textually-attested phenomena, or interpreting material data through the lens of linguistic metaphors (e.g. describing the archaeological record as a type of "text" to be "read"). In the wake of the "material turn" in archaeology, however, materiality-focused perspectives provide a productive alternative framework for putting archaeological, visual, and textual evidence into dialogue. As a case study in the "entanglement" (in Hodder's terms) of objects, texts, images, and people, the present paper examines a selection of Roman-period amulets engraved with "magical" inscriptions.

Throughout the eastern Mediterranean during the Roman empire, many people used amulets inscribed with divine images, "magical" signs, and "names of power" or "*voces magicae*": unusual words that often look like gibberish in Greek or Latin, although they are sometimes derived from other languages such as Egyptian or Hebrew. Magical papyri and curse tablets present similar cryptic words as containing great ritual power, often describing them as the secret names of gods. Amulets inscribed with such *voces magicae* are thus texts – but texts whose uses and "meanings" derive, in large part, from their materiality rather than their semantic content. Since specific types of stones were thought to possess different magico-medical qualities, consumers likely valued amulets for their raw material as much as – or more than – for their inscriptions. And yet those inscriptions' very *lack* of semantic content (at least in the primary language of most of their users) often appears as a source of power in its own right: their very unreadability confirms their ability to communicate with supernatural powers.

In conjunction with their material media and associated engraved images, these "magical" inscriptions raise questions not only about the relationships between words, images, and objects, but also the relationships between human and object agency. Amulets were perceived as agents in their own right, not only depictions but also embodiments of divinity – yet they also function as extensions of their users' agency, enabling individuals to exert power over other people and even over the gods themselves. A materiality-based approach to these objects offers not only an opportunity to investigate the interactions of texts and images, but also a set of conceptual tools for interrogating how the material world (including material texts) shapes human experience.

Respondent - Mehmet Ali Ataç, Bryn Mawr College

Session V: Landscapes and Texts
Saturday, December 12th

Satellite Remote Sensing, Archaeological Survey, and Historical Geography in Northern Mesopotamia
Jesse Casana, Dartmouth College

Traditionally, there has been relatively little communication between archaeologists, who use regional survey and remote sensing methods to reconstruct regional patterns of ancient settlement, and historians, who use texts, inscriptions and linguistic analysis to reconstruct historical toponymy and the political geography of ancient kingdoms.   By underutilizing available texts, archaeological research tends towards excessively functionalist and deterministic explanations of settlement, flattening variability and suppressing the potential richness of the material culture record.   On the other hand, historical reconstructions of ancient states undertaken without reference to actual archaeological sites or regional patterns of settlement, divorce polities from their physical landscapes and portray them as simplified blobs-on-a-map.

Relying on analysis of declassified CORONA satellite imagery, this paper presents results of an effort to map systematically all major archaeological sites across a large study area extending from the Mediterranean coast of Syria to the uplands of northern Iraq. A dataset of more than 15,000 sites, some 11,000 of which are as-yet undocumented by archaeologists, has then been subjected to morphological analysis, classifying these sites in order to find regional patterns in their size, location, and morphology. Focusing on northern Mesopotamia in the second millennium B.C., an integrated analysis of both the archaeological landscape and relevant texts reveals new insights into the spatial dimensions of political power and the territorial manifestations of Bronze Age states, as well as suggesting possible locations for several as-yet unidentified ancient cities.

The Authority of the Archive: Textual Fabrication of Anatolian Landscapes and Archaeological Resistance
Ömür Harmanşah, University of Illinois at Chicago

The Middle Bronze Age in the Central Anatolian Plateau (modern central Turkey), roughly between the beginning of the second millennum B.C. to the emergence of the Hittite Empire in the mid-seventeenth century B.C., is often discussed as the "Assyrian Colony Period" in academic literature. This naming itself presents us not only an example of a colonial naming practice, documenting a spatial as well as temporal occupation of the underdeveloped Anatolian landscapes, but also the canonical practice of maintaining this colonial discourse in the contemporary academic parlance. The archives and written documents excavated from the "Old Assyrian trade" settlements in Turkey, primarily from the mound of Kültepe near Kayseri, have long been used authoritatively as the primary source for imagining and reconstructing the history of this marginal landscape, while the archaeological evidence only come under consideration either to affirm that imagination or fill its gaps. Therefore the dominant narratives of this "colonial episode" in the Near Eastern history derive heavily from mercantile, elitist, and statist perspectives of capitalist modernity, which is rarely questioned. This paper interrogates the uncritical use of texts as authoritative in thinking about the nature of settlement and the political ecology of the Central Plateau, and calls for an alternative, place-based, postcolonial rethinking of this cultural geography through the independent use of archaeological evidence drawn from intensive and extensive regional survey projects.

Respondent - Gojko Barjamovic, Harvard University

Session VI: Bioarchaeology and Texts
Saturday, December 12th

Title tbc
Levent Atıcı, University of Nevada, Las Vegas

[Abstract forthcoming]

Reading Bodies and Exhuming Texts: Formulating a Historical Bioarchaeology of the Near East
Megan A. Perry, East Carolina University

The field of Near Eastern archaeology forms the nexus of varied methodological traditions for exploring the past: philology, epigraphy, art history, classical archaeology, biblical archaeology, and anthropological archaeology, to name just a few. Bioarchaeology, one aspect of anthropological archaeology, is a growing approach in the Near East to answer historical and archaeological questions through the analysis of human skeletal remains. The human skeleton not only provides a palimpsest of an individual's life experiences, but can illuminate community-level differences in adaptation to particular environments and the impact of political, economic, and climatological change. As bioarchaeology as a discipline matures, scholars are considering its intersection with social theory and text-based approaches to exploring the past. In particular, the bioarchaeological analysis of historical-period populations needs to include sound scientific analysis of the body in addition to deep historiographical analysis of the texts. Here this discussion is brought within the context of the Near East, with its long history of philological and epigraphic analysis, to explore "best practices" for incorporating these two data sets.

Respondent - Walther Sallaberger, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München

Session VII: Comparanda, Near and Far: Egypt and Mesoamerica
Saturday, December 12th

Histories of Decline and Fall: Archaeology, Epigraphy, and the Maya Collapse
Nick Carter, Brown University

Beginning in the late 8th century A.D., royal dynasties disintegrated and cities were abandoned across the southern Maya lowlands, even as areas to the north underwent fluorescence and population growth. Recent archaeological findings point to climate change as the major "big picture" driver of the collapse. For many sites, they also suggest that subroyal elites coordinated and survived the end of kingship. Epigraphers have searched in vain for historical accounts of those events written by the ancient Maya themselves. Yet improving understandings of Classic Maya monumental rhetoric, and careful attention to monuments as artifacts, elucidate the collapse as a historical processes by connecting late inscriptions - what they say, how they say it, what they omit - with the rest of the archaeological record. This paper presents such connections from three parts of the Maya world: the Petexbatun and Pasión drainages, the southern city of Copan, and the metropolis of Tikal with its neighbors.

Title tbc
Kate Spence, University of Cambridge

[Abstract forthcoming]

Respondent - Elizabeth Frood, University of Oxford

Session VIII: Lessons from the Aegean
Saturday, December 12th

'Blended Administration': Reflections on the Implication of Written Texts and Palatial Activities in the Late Bronze Age Aegean
John Bennet, British School at Athens / University of Sheffield

The Aegean is 'quantitatively challenged' in comparison to many areas of the western Old World in the number of preserved written documents: of the three scripts attested in the region, only Linear B offers a significant number, its almost 6,000 texts unevenly distributed in time (14th-13th century B.C.) and space (Crete and southern mainland Greece). Because Linear B has been deciphered, allowing us to read most of its content, and because texts are relatively rare, their presence in any particular archaeological context generates considerable archaeological attention and, as a result, we have good spatial control on their recovery in most sites excavated since the mid-20th century. It follows from the above that context and association play an important part in maximising the information the Linear B documents can offer about the operation of the palatial polities of the 14th-13th century Aegean.

In this paper I draw on this appreciation of context to explore the relationship between writing (including sealing practices) and some areas of palatial activity implicated with written administration. I consider what was documented (and what was not – hence 'blended') with a view to determining at which points in two areas of palatial activity writing 'intervened' and in what manner: the *chaîne opératoire* of production processes and processes of provisioning and collection through obligation. The concept of administrative 'reach' (e.g., Postgate 2001) is useful here. I hope this examination will generate fruitful points for discussion among Aegeanists and those working on less 'quantitatively challenged' textual-archaeological traditions elsewhere in the western Old World.

The Literary Texts of Classical Antiquity
Naoíse Mac Sweeney, University of Leicester

Students of classical antiquity, no less than those of the Ancient Near East, have long grappled with how to make use both texts and archaeology. Significant debates remain over how evidence from different sources can sensibly be combined; how far individual scholars are ever able to achieve full interdisciplinarity; and to what extent methodologies and approaches can be transferred from one discipline to another. In this paper, I will focus on the last of these three issues. I will first consider how classical archaeologists in the last three decades have used the idea of 'material culture as text' to develop nuanced 'readings' of objects in their wider social contexts. I will also consider how literary scholars have employed the idea of 'text as material culture' to re-contextualise their sources as objects with a physical existence in antiquity. Finally, I will argue that there is another area in which literary scholars might fruitfully adopt archaeological approaches – specifically, in the archaeological concept of the assemblage. The analogy of the archaeological assemblage bears striking resemblance to certain bodies of literary material; in particular, corpora of fragmentary texts or subject-specific references. I will illustrate this with reference to the 'assemblage' of literary texts that discuss the Ionian Migration – a movement of people between the western and the eastern Aegean that was presumed to have occurred in the Early Iron Age.

Respondent - Jonathan Hall, University of Chicago

Session IX: Textual Islamic and Medieval Historical Archaeology
Sunday, December 13th

Telling Archaeological Stories: Test Cases from the Crusader Arena
Scott Redford, School of Oriental and African Studies

Chris Wickham is one of the contemporary medieval historians who uses archaeological data the most. His opinions on archaeology, and archaeological method, are based on more reading and analysis of archaeological data than most historians. It is perhaps surprising, then, to read in his *The Inheritance of Rome* (2009) that he believes that history has to do with "causations" and archaeology with "functional relations." Although he states that ideally the two (historical and archaeological data) should be used together, he also writes that "Archaeological and material evidence is at least free from the constraints of narrative."
This paper will attempt to use archaeological data (survey and excavation) from the medieval eastern Mediterranean to test Wickham's assertions, and try to tell stories (write narrative) using archaeological data.

Historical Archaeology: Bridging between Monuments and Unheard Voices
Nanouschka Myrberg Burström, Stockholms Universitet

The field 'Historical Archaeology' grew out from the urge to make explicit the specific conditions certain archaeologists work under – using methods developed for prehistory within periods with an increasing number of written sources – in order to make more conscious and fruitful use of those specificities. A fundamental insight is that 'historical archaeology' refers not to one specific chronological period or to a specific cultural context, but to all archaeology dealing with periods with extant written sources – working 'between artefact and text'. This includes diverse contexts like the Classical periods in different parts of the world, the European Middle Ages, as well as the recent past. Focus within the field has thus been theoretical and methodological issues of general relevance, such as how to work with contrasts as well as complementary, or the relation between material culture and texts and other sources of evidence like images. Historical archaeologists studying the Classical periods and the Middle Ages have, due to the nature of extant sources, often focused on monumental architecture, major religions, and the upper classes. Much Historical Archeology is however conducted in former colonial areas. Therefore, one important line of inquiry interplays with post-colonial theory and has generated a more political tradition, aiming to forward 'voices less heard' and to question the present out from the past. In practice this tends to divide the field into medieval and post-medieval studies, despite the outspokenly non-chronological definition. However, it has also refueled the historical archaeology world-wide, opening up for the present development to include the recent past into archeology. Some of the major issues and lines of inquiry of the historical-archaeological field will be traced and exemplified here to inspire comparisons and encourage inter-disciplinary exchanges.

Respondent - Patrick Geary, Institute for Advanced Study